

Rogers Park Community Council

7pm Monday, August 10, 2020

Zoom Meeting ID: 845 5914 6240 Passcode: 980412

Updates and Notices

Anchor Park, College Village, Rogers
Park and Woodside East

I. Discussion: Proposed Purchase of Golden Lion for use as Treatment/Homeless Shelter

II. Committee Updates:

A. Health and Safety Committee:

1. Continue to report Homeless Camps at [ANCWORKS CAMP REPORTING](#)

B. Gardening and beautification of RPCC- Update

RPCC Board approved \$500 for plants and community summer event

C. Midtown Congestion Relief (MCR) Bob Butera, Dave Evans, Jim Wright and/or Steve Noble (DOWL)** Final Midtown Congestion Relief Planning and Environmental Linkages Study.

http://www.midtowncongestionrelief.com/documents/PEL%20Report_FINAL_20200513.reduced.pdf

D. Treasurers Report: Ric Wilson, Treasurer

E. Nominating Committee: Peter Mjos, Chair

Nominees to stand for Election at our September 14th 2020 Council meeting:

Steve Lindbeck, President

Linda Chase, Vice President

Treasurer, Ric Wilson

Secretary, Mark Foster

F. ADU Committee: Dan Rosenberg, Chair – update

III. **Representative Reports:**

A. Assembly Report(s): Meg Zaletel & Felix Rivera

B. Legislative Report(s): Representative Andy Josephson (HD-17)
Representative Harriet Drummond (HD-18)
Senator Elvi Gray-Jackson (SD-I)

C. School Board Report: Margo Bellamy, School Board member

Notices:

Notice of Virtual Meeting Tonight, August 5th!

You can [go to this link](#) to read the Mayor's press release on the Q&A.

The event runs from 6:00 – 7:30 p.m. Wednesday, August 5. The link to access the event is muni.org/AO66.

Rogers Park Community Council: <http://www.communitycouncils.org/servlet/content/28.html>

Federation of Community Councils: <http://www.communitycouncils.org/servlet/content/home.html>

Note from Meg Zaletel:

Hello -

Thank you for emailing and taking the time to share your thoughts about the proposed property purchases in AO 2020-66. We have received an enormous amount of email, phone and in person testimony on this ordinance. And while I try to keep up and respond to each individual email, in this instance I simply cannot. Instead I thought it best to address concerns raised and provide you a preview of position in advance of this evening's debate. I have read the concerns especially those from Heather Meadows, Rogers Park, Geneva Woods and College Village. If you have already received a response individually, I apologize for the follow up email, but this one is much more comprehensive.

As a little background, I have spent 20-40 hours per week since I was elected working on issues related to homelessness. It has been my primary focus as chair of the Committee on Homelessness and because of my professional background as a healthcare and mental health lawyer with nearly a decade of monitoring a variety of care facilities in Anchorage and throughout the state.

For those who do not wish to read on, I'll cut to the chase - I support the purchase of these properties, including the two Midtown facilities. I believe that this is an opportunity to make real and lasting change regarding homelessness and get at one of the root issues, substance misuse. As I provide a more detailed explanation below I will highlight some of the amendments that are also before us. Please keep in mind that each amendment must be voted on individually and passed.

Why purchase buildings to provide shelter and transitional housing and how is that now related to COVID-19?

For many years Anchorage's response to homelessness was to rely on private shelter providers, whether that was low barrier shelter at Brother Francis, or higher barrier shelter at the Gospel Rescue Mission, Claire House or the Downtown Hope Center. These providers stepped up and provided shelter using state grants and donations. And then around 2018, the Municipality started modestly funding additional shelter capacity during the winter at Bean Cafe at \$150k.

As I have seen in my 15 years in Anchorage, the number of unsheltered homeless grew here and among many west coast cities and as that happened, we learned that the need for shelter exceeded the capacity. In response, Mayor Berkowitz and his team employed a housing first model with the intent of moving people from homelessness (either in shelter or not) directly to housing. There was some good success with this at Karluk Manor and the Red Roof Inn despite initial community opposition. However, as the State support to communities decreased significantly culminating in the past two years with vetos that support many housing programs, we needed to take a different tact since housing first was no longer viable without reliable state support. During this time no additional shelter investment was made by the Municipality and we saw camps grow along our greenbelts as well as into Midtown.

Under my leadership, the Assembly took the lead and unanimously funded in the 2020 budget year round shelter. The aim of that funding was to provide an adequate number of shelter beds all year so that camping could be abated. Additionally the aim was to provide connections to service providers at shelter so that individuals could start to ladder out of homelessness and toward an appropriate permanent living situation.

Before that work of year round shelter could be done, COVID-19 hit. The CDC issued guidance that shelter for those experiencing homelessness required at least 6 feet of physical distancing between

cots, bunks or mats, not something readily available at any of our shelters. In response through the Emergency Operations Center, shelter capacity was reduced and the mass shelters at Sullivan Arena and Ben Boeke were put online. As the COVID-19 emergency has persisted and it became summer the Ben Boeke was put back into service as an ice arena as people moved outside. However, the Assembly moved quickly to prevent a proliferation of camps this summer and invested in additional camp abatement and outreach. Also, the administration coordinated service providers to be on-site at the mass shelter to help get as many individuals into stable housing as possible.

All of that background and current event recap is to show that while we have had a long standing need for shelter, COVID-19 and the CDC guidance made that need urgent and acute. I do not see COVID-19 restrictions being removed any time soon so shelter will have to continue to be provided with less people per location to ensure physical distancing. To those who suggest keeping the Sullivan Arena online for the duration of the COVID-19 emergency, that is an expensive proposition. Annual costs are close to \$9M and while FEMA currently reimburses a substantial portion of those costs right now, we do not know how long that will last and if FEMA ends its support we can not afford to maintain the Sullivan as a shelter long term.

Related, the purchase of the Golden Lion is not proposed to come from Cares Act funding, but the proceeds from the ML&P sale. The approved stipulation set aside funds specifically for purposes of bringing online treatment as proposed within the Municipality for a variety of individuals in need not just those experiencing homelessness.

What about the location of these facilities near neighborhoods? Aren't we spreading out the problem?

Visible homelessness has become a problem in Midtown, whether along the Chester and Campbell Creek greenbelts or the street corners or even in the Loussac Library. I receive countless calls and emails frustrated about the visible homelessness in Midtown. Therefore, Midtown requires a solution. A solution that will allow those in need a place to go, shelter, but also provide the Municipality the legal ability to enforce no camping ordinances and other public nuisance laws. Quite frankly, shelter downtown is not enough to take in those individuals in Midtown. Additionally, many of the folks in Midtown will not go downtown to shelter.

Placing shelter near those we intend to serve make sense. Isolation or distance is only another barrier to utilizing shelter. From 3rd Avenue it is hard to access many services and from midtown it is hard to access the shelter at 3rd Avenue.

Now let's talk about the "problem." The problem as described to me about homelessness is that it is visible, that people do not want help and that the shelter downtown has created a scene where people congregate along the 3rd Avenue corridor and create trash, do drugs and engage in other unwelcome behavior. So how do we address the various problems? If we do not provide a place for people to go, they will remain on the streets and trails and without anywhere to go the attendant issues of trash and unwelcome behavior will continue to persist.

Additionally, let's remember that shelter previously was not under Municipal control. To the extent there was any Muni oversight it came from calls to APD and the fire department when there were problems. We have learned that if we want to ensure that shelter does not have neighborhood impacts, Muni control is essential. We can do that through a variety of mechanism - owning the building, funding the services and requiring specific operation and security plans and ultimately being able to shut down operations that do not conform to Muni requirements. This type of shelter has never existed within the Municipality. Similarly with regard to the proposal for Spenard, this type of transitional housing has never existed within the Municipality.

Why use the Golden Lion as a treatment center, won't it be dangerous due to its location and bring unwanted foot traffic to the neighborhood?

The proposed treatment center is inpatient. The analysis by the Anchorage Health Department and the State of Alaska both suggest that what is needed is a Level 3.3 treatment center, which is highly structured inpatient care. While the ultimate span of care will be determined in part by the provider responses to the RFP, I am certain that this need will drive that process. Also, Felix and I have an amendment to the purchase that will require secure egress from the building and I have already spoken at length with the administration that dedicated transportation for patients (for medical or other offsite appointments) will be key to ensuring safety and treatment compliance. Thus, the concerns about foot traffic should be mitigated and there ultimately should be less traffic associated with the location than currently as a hotel. Additionally, Felix and I also have an amendment that would prevent this facility from ever being used as a homeless shelter while owned by the Municipality.

How will operations of these facilities be sustained?

It is estimated that annual costs of all four facilities will be \$7M per year. However, those costs will not be borne by the Municipality in totality for the life of the facilities. Members Quinn-Davidson, LaFrance and I have an amendment that would restrict Municipal funding of these facilities through the alcohol tax to no more than 50% of the total operations. Let's break down some of the costs and where funding is projected to come from:

1. Treatment Center (Golden Lion) - \$2.5M operating per year
 1. The Municipality should be prepared to fully support the first few years of operations of a treatment facility while a provider gets up and running. The initial \$2M cost should come from the alcohol tax.
 2. After that time, private insurance, Medicaid and private pay should be able to sustain the operations of the treatment facility.
2. Midtown Shelter and Day Engagement Centers (AK Club & Beans) - \$3M for overnight and day engagement centers
 1. The Assembly has already built into its budget a majority of the overnight shelter costs at \$735K. The outstanding amount needed is \$360K. That money is proposed to come from the alcohol tax.
 2. Day engagement centers at the Midtown Shelter and at the Beans building are proposed to come from philanthropy for the first 3 years.
 3. In the intervening time, the identified shelter provider is uniquely situated to potentially take advantage of the 1115 Medicaid Waiver recently brought online by the State. As we've heard, there are many individuals experiencing homelessness that also experience a substance use disorder or mental health issues. The purpose of the 1115 waiver is to create an "integrated behavioral health system of care for Alaskans experiencing serious mental illness, severe emotional disturbance, substance use disorder (SUD), co-occurring substance use and mental illness, and at-risk families and children."
3. Transitional Housing (America's Best Inn) - \$1.5M
 1. Federal grant funding is available for this type of housing. The Muni through a different portion of the Cares Act funding received funds to support this operation while it works toward sustainability through Medicaid billing. Private philanthropy is also expected to contribute to initial operations.
 2. Like the shelters, this will primarily be funded after a period of start up with 1115 Medicaid waiver funds and later housing vouchers. As discussed more fully below, the State's continuum of care has been broken for many years and these efforts are a way in

which the Municipality is stepping up and into a traditional state roll to address problems instead of waiting for the State's assistance.

Will you please not move people around and instead solve the problem?

Yes, that's exactly what this plan intends to do. We have been playing a never ending game of whack-a-mole with camp abatement without sufficient shelter capacity trying to meet the public's demands to remove the camps and people on street corners. That game will not end until we build shelter capacity. Camp abatement without shelter is a waste of money. In addition, unsheltered homelessness leads to an increase in calls for service to APD and AFD, both costly responses.

What about Intervention2020? Isn't this really a State problem?

Throughout public testimony and via email we have heard a lot of interest in Intervention2020. To provide some context to my opposition to the plan, I think it is important to acknowledge that for the last decade the State has significantly cut behavioral health funding and it is now the largest mental health provider through the Department of Corrections. The level of services outlined by DOC in its various facilities are far less than what a program like Intervention2020 would require. In many ways, this type of plan has already been in operation for the past decade already with little to no success. And to suggest expanding it through the incarceration or involuntary treatment of individuals for low level offenses violates several provisions of the State constitutions as well as federal disability laws.

So yes, the homelessness Anchorage has been left to resolve is in large part to the State issue, it is due to the divestment in key social programs such as behavioral health and substance abuse treatment and we cannot reasonably expect the State to step in and resolve the issue.

I know this email even it its length did not address every question or concern posed, but I do believe it highlighted the inherent flaws on waiting for the State to step forward, the issues surround not enough shelter and housing capacity and that we have a fiscal plan moving forward that will sustain the operations of the facilities. If we do nothing, nothing will change and the Municipality runs a real and substantial risk of having to continue a very costly operation for shelter at the Sullivan which could leave tax payers on the hook for close to \$9M a year.

Now is the time to make a smart investment and create the infrastructure that will provide lasting change many residents have been advocating toward for years.

Sincerely,

Meg Zaletel

Midtown Assembly Member

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She/her (pronouns)

Dena'inaq elnen'aq' gheshtnu ch'q'u yeshdu. (Dena'ina)
I live and work on Dena'ina land. (English)